

END OF PSALM 86

You are Psalms

Some people think you never get discouraged, but the fact is, when you do, you know where to run. Your prayers are open and honest because you realize that God already knows your heart, He's just waiting to hear you spill it. And when you do, what starts out as heavy ends up becoming a song of praise. You may struggle... and often you do... but each time, you grow in your understanding of God's faithfulness. You're just a song waiting to happen.

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PSALMS (SONGS OF PRAISE)

TRUST
IN THE
LORD *and do good;
dwell in the land and
enjoy safe pasture.*
PSALM 36: 3

PSALM NUMBER: 86

The glory of the church of Christ.

1. The foundations thereof are in the holy mountains.
2. The Lord loveth the gates of Sion above all the tabernacles of Jacob.
3. Glorious things are said of thee, O city of God.
4. I will be mindful of Rahab and of Babylon knowing me. Behold, the foreigners and Tyre, and the people of the Ethiopians, these were there.
5. Shall not Sion say: This man and that man is born in her? And the Highest himself hath founded her.
6. The Lord shall tell in his writings of peoples and of princes, of them that have been in her.
7. The dwelling in thee is as it were of all rejoicing.

The Psalms are songs of praise and cover a period of about 1000 years, from the time of Moses (ca. 1400 B.C.) to the Israelites' return from exile (ca. 450 B.C.). They deal with selected events of that period and provide us with the thoughts and feelings of those who went through the experiences recorded. After being made a Cardinal by Pope Clement VIII, Saint Robert Bellarmine, prepared for posterity his very own commentary on each of the Psalms. Enclosed are his interpretations on each of the Psalms.

PSALM NUMBER: 86

EXPLANATION OF THE PSALM

1. "The foundations thereof are in the holy mountains." The Prophet commences by praising the city, by reason of the holy mountain it has for a foundation. He names not the city, but sees descending from heaven, the Church of Christ, whose foundations may be considered in various lights. If we regard the first founders and propagators of the Christian religion, the foundations signify the twelve apostles, as we read in Apocalypse 21, "and the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." If we consider the doctrine on which the faith of the Church is founded, the foundations are the apostles and the prophets, who were the immediate ministers of the word of God, of whom the apostle says, "built upon the foundations of the apostles and the prophets." Finally, if we regard ecclesiastical power and authority, according to which the foundation in a house corresponds with the head in a body, Christ and Peter are the foundations, Christ being the primary. Of Christ the apostle says, "for no one can lay any other foundation but that which is laid, which is Christ Jesus;" and of Peter, Christ himself says, "thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church." Those, then, the holy mountains, upon which the city of God is built, getting the name of mountains by reason of their altitude and excellence; and holy, for their elevation is not by reason of their pride, but by reason of their sanctity, wisdom, and authority. The objection of Christ's being called the cornerstone surmounting the edifice, viz., "the stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner;" and also, "Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone," as if no consequence, for there are two cornerstones, one in the foundation, the other in the summit of the building, and both connecting two walls; and though, in an ordinary building, the same stone cannot be in the foundation supporting the entire building, and on the top supported by the building; still, in the spiritual edifice, one and the same stone, that is, one and the same prelate, supports and bears the whole edifice by his authority, while at the same time, he presides over and is borne, through obedience, by the whole edifice, but all the living stones, which two duties apply principally, to Christ, who is absolutely the head and ruler of the whole Church; and they also apply to the supreme Pontiff, who is Christ's vicar on earth; and, to a certain extent, to all prelates, in regard of those over whom they preside, for all prelates should bear and be borne; bear with the infirmities of those over whom they are placed, they be borne with when they correct or command. The city has another subject of praise in its gates.

2. “The Lord loveth the gates of Sion above all the tabernacles of Jacob.” Having said that the city of God had holy mountains for its foundations, so that there was no fear of its falling, like buildings erected on sand; he now adds, that with its being exempt from danger on that score, it also is incapable of being stormed by the enemy, so strongly are the gates of it fortified; Psalm 147 saying of them “because he hath strengthened the bolts of thy gates.” “The Lord loveth the gates of Sion,” by reason of the strength of its gates, that render it impregnable “above all the tabernacles of Jacob;” loves those gates more than the tabernacles of Jacob; for, however beautiful and elegant laid out those tabernacles may have been when the Jews were on their journey from Egypt to the land of promise, still they had neither gates nor foundations, and, therefore, were frail and temporary. These words refer to the stability and permanence of the Church, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail; and especially to the time when it shall arrive at its heavenly country, for which the patriarch sighed, and of whom the apostle says, “for he looked for a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God;” and, in the Apocalypse, the new Jerusalem is said to have “twelve gates, and in the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel.” By the twelve gates we understand the twelve apostles; for it is through their true and sound preaching that we all enter into the Church of God: their being called the foundations in another place is of no moment, for they are gates and foundations together; gates by their preaching, foundations by their support of the faithful. Christ, to be sure, said, “I am the gate;” Christ is the gate, no doubt, because it is through his merits we all enter, and are saved; but the city has twelve gates and one gate, as well as it has one foundation and twelve foundations, for Christ was in the apostles, and spoke through the apostles, as St. Paul says, “do you seek a proof of Christ who speaketh in me?” Thus, when we enter through the apostles, we enter through Christ, because the apostles did not preach up themselves, but through Christ, and Christ preached through them; and, when we are founded and built upon the apostles, we have founded and built on Christ. The names of the twelve tribes of Israel being written on the gates signifies that the first members of the Church came from the children of Israel, to whom the apostles themselves belonged; then came the fullness of the Gentiles. In the Apocalypse, when mention is made of the elect, and of those to be saved, mention is first made of twelve thousand from each of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel; and then follows “a great multitude; which no man could number, of all nations and tribes, and peoples, and tongues.”

3. “Glorious things are said of thee, O city of God.” The Prophet, as it were, intoxicated with the spirit, as he began abruptly by admiring the excellence of the city, saying, “the foundations thereof are in the holy mountain,” not just as abruptly changes his mode of speech and addresses the city itself, saying, “glorious things are said of thee, O city of God;” as much as to say, Holy city, do not wonder if I began incoherently, for I am overwhelmed by the multitude of your praises; for the Holy Ghost has been telling me many glorious, grand, and wonderful things about you. And, in fact, who could observe any order in narrating the praises of the city where God will be all unto all, and where those

blessings are reserved for the elect, “which eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, and which hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive.” And though, strictly speaking, the city of God in heaven, and, to a certain extent, his Church, spread over the earth, are alluded to here, even of that earthly Jerusalem, type, as it was, of the Church, “glorious things are said.” It was a royal and sacerdotal city, the Temple of the Lord, the Ark of the Covenant, and many things belonging to both were there; and what is more, there it was that the king of the Angels and the Lord of all nature gave his instructions, performed his miracles, effected the redemption of the human race, was buried there, sent the Holy Ghost from heaven there, and there laid the foundations of his church to endure.

4. “I will be mindful of Rehab and of Babylon knowing me. Behold, the foreigners and Tyre, and the people of the Ethiopians, these were there.” He now praises the holy city, by reason of the number and variety of the nations who inhabit it, for it is not confined to the Jews alone, as was the case in the Old Testament; but all nations are to inhabit the Catholic Church, which is the true Jerusalem, so praised in this Psalm. He mentions Rahab and Babylon, Palestine, Tyre, and the Ethiopians, all Gentiles, but well-known to the Jews. Rahab means proud, and by it he means the Egyptians; and the meaning is: in calling and enrolling the elect of the new Jerusalem, I will bear in mind, not only the Jews, but even the Egyptians and Babylonians, who know me through faith and religious worship. For behold, the foreigners, the nations of Palestine, and the people of Tyre, and the Ethiopians “were there,” that is, those nations called and invited by me, will be there too; for he makes use, of the past tense, as usual, the signify the future.

5. “Shall not Sion say: this man and that man is born in her? And the Highest himself hath founded her.” The Prophet now adds, as the chief praise of Sion, that the Highest, the Son of God, who founded her, was born in her. For the most glorious thing that could be said of her was, that he who, in his divine nature, founded her, chose, it is human nature, to be born in her. The text should be read thus, according to the Hebrew, “shall not this man say to Sion?” Is it possible that anyone will say to Sion a thing so wonderful and so unheard-of, “that a man is born in her, and the Highest himself hath founded her?” Will anyone tell Sion that there is one born in her, her very creator? This very evident prophecy has been carped at by the Jews, who cannot possibly get over it. Christ, however, was born in Bethlehem, and not in Sion; to which we reply, that the Sion spoken of here means the church of God’s people, and that Christ, as man, was born therein, while, as God, he is the founder of it. It may also be fairly said that Christ was born in Sion, in as much as his parents, Solomon and David, his ancestors, belonged to Sion.

6. “The Lord shall tell in his writings of peoples and princes, of them that have been in her.” He answers the question he put when he said, “Will any one say to Sion?” For he says the Lord himself will put the question; nay more, in order that it may be kept in eternal memory, that he will write it in the book in which are the people and the princes, who through regeneration have been in the city. “The Lord shall tell;” will announce that in Sion one has been born who is the very founder of the city of Sion; and he will tell it “in his writings of peoples and of princes;” in the roles of

those people and princes who have been regenerated in the city, for he who is the head of them all, is also the founder of the city; and will, therefore, be written in the head of the book. That book will be published on the day of judgment, for then the books will be opened with another book, the book of life, of which our Savior says, “rejoice because your names are written in heaven.” By princes we understand the apostles whom God appointed princes over all the earth.

7. “The dwelling in thee is as it were of all rejoicing.” The conclusion of the Psalm, declaring the supreme happiness of all the inhabitants of that city, whose foundations were alluded to in the beginning of the Psalm; for the peculiar happiness of the holy city of Jerusalem is, that in it no poor, no sad, no miserable person is to be found, for “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes;” and though this is to be accomplished in the heavenly Jerusalem only, still in the Church militant, those who are enrolled citizens in heaven are all rejoicing in hope, and to them the Savior says, “nobody shall take your joy from you;” and the apostle, “always rejoicing;” and in fact, if God’s servants rejoice even in tribulation, when can they be sad? St. Augustine remarks that the Psalmist does not use the word “rejoicing” absolutely, but “as it were of all rejoicing,” lest we should suppose that the joy spoken of here was such as we see with the children of this world, will rejoice in the acquisition of gold or silver, or in carnal pleasures, or the like. The dwelling in the heavenly Jerusalem will be, to a certain extent, like a dwelling where a banquet or a wedding feast is celebrated with music, songs, and pleasure; but no such things will have a place there, nor will the cause be the same for such joy and gladness.